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AUTHOR Haycock, Kati; Brown, Nevin
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ABSTRACT

This paper proposes community-based "K-16" Councils as part of a movement to establish a new type of relationship between elementary and secondary schools and higher education. A preface describes the meeting that originated these ideas. A brief section follows describing the historical relationship of higher and secondary education and the two college-school partnership movements which failed to deeply involve higher education or to bring systematic change. Leaders from both systems are urged to join in a new effort based on systemic reforms, significant higher education reform (including teacher training, student admissions, and service delivery to schools), and mutual cooperation. At the local level, proposed K-16 Councils would analyze student achievement patterns through college, develop comprehensive systems change plans to improve student outcomes, and report annually to the public on student achievement patterns, effort to improve them and what parents and others can do to help. At the national level a national K-16 Council could promote establishment of local councils, provide a forum for dialogue and a home for research or projects of mutual interest, speak out on policy issues, and provide leadership. (JB)

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ED 369 356

HIGHER EDUCATION AND THE SCHOOLS: A CALL TO ACTION AND STRATEGY FOR CHANGE

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INTRODUCTION AND CALL TO ACTION

Last January, a small group of college presidents and other education leaders came together in St. Louis because our experiences in our own communities convinced us of the urgent need for institutions of higher education to rethink their relationships with local school districts. Individually, we had been struggling with new approaches. But we wanted to share ideas with others who were similarly engaged.

Perhaps more important, we wanted to develop a strategy to engage other college leaders in this effort, especially those based in urban centers. Why? Because we believe that the future of our cities--indeed, of our whole nation--is at stake. Our visit to East St. Louis on the first morning of the January meeting reinforced that conclusion: conditions in America's cities and the schools within them are such that it will take an all-out effort by both systems--higher education and the schools--working closely with the community to assure a decent, productive future for these young people and the society that depends on them.

As nearly everyone knows, American students are not achieving at the levels of their peers overseas, and achievement has remained stagnant for over a decade. But poor and minority students fare even worse--often because of the poor schooling they receive. Seventeen year-old black and latino students finish school with skills about the same as white 13 year-olds; drop-out rates in inner city high schools often approach 50%. And, among the few inner city youngsters who manage to gain entry into college, postsecondary drop-out rates make high school rates seem modest.

Certainly, the poverty, racism, violence and overwhelming family stresses so rampant in these communities take their toll on student achievement. Yet we know that quality education can make a major difference in the lives of poor and minority children. As education leaders we must and will speak out more forcefully on these issues. We will also work harder to create mechanisms to assure that the vast storehouses of knowledge within institutions of higher education are actively applied to solving these vexing social problems.

Even more important, though, we must confess that there are conditions within our educational systems that exacerbate the effects of social problems. All too often, our institutions are hostile to those who arrive at the door unfamiliar with the rituals within. At every level, we sort students rather than bring them together; we divide knowledge into manageable bits, rather than strive for coherence; we teach for coverage, rather than for understanding; and we ignore the cultural and personal assets and strengths that all students bring with them to the classroom. And to those who need the most--the most time, the best teaching, the richest curriculum--we typically give the least of everything. In short, we often make things worse, rather than better.

Unlike poverty and racism and health care and urban violence, these problems in education are NOT beyond our control. Indeed, as education leaders, we have within our hands the levers to make changes more important than any other to the future of our young people. For no other system can enable students to master the knowledge and skills that they need to assume productive roles in our society.

Yet we in higher education have been all too silent on this subject. Instead of turning outward and doing our part in the effort to improve student outcomes, we have spent much of the last decade turned inward.

It is vitally important that leaders from colleges and universities step forward to assert a stronger voice on reform matters, pre-k through post-graduate. We must also roll up our sleeves and go to work on the many difficult tasks inherent in genuine systems change. But to do this will require us to create new vehicles for cross-systems collaboration, both at the local and national level.

With leadership and support from AAHE, we have crafted a new initiative that will be launched at a meeting on June 29-30, 1993 in Washington, DC. Called "K-16", this initiative will enlist leaders from higher education in both local and national reform efforts.

"K-16" is described more fully in the pages that follow. We hope that you will join with us by establishing a K-16 Council in your community and becoming a part of this nation-wide network.

Ernest Boyer, Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching
Alfredo de los Santos, Maricopa Community Colleges
Mary Diez, Alverno College
Paul Elsner, Maricopa Community Colleges
Norman Francis, Xavier University
Sheldon Hackney, University of Pennsylvania
Donald Kennedy, Stanford University
Earl Lazerson, Southern Illinois University at Edwardsville
Dale Lick, Florida State University
Peter Magrath, National Association of State Universities and Land Grant Colleges
Bob McCabe, Miami-Dade Community Colleges
Charles McCallum, University of Alabama at Birmingham
Diana Natalicio, University of Texas-El Paso
Frank Newman, Education Commission of the States
Tessa Martinez Pollack, Miami-Dade Community Colleges
Judith Ramaley, Portland State University
Neil Rudenstine, Harvard University
Blanche Touhill, University of Missouri-St. Louis
Blenda Wilson, California State University, Northridge

THE HISTORICAL CONTEXT

The history of higher education's involvement with elementary and secondary education in this country is long and deep. For much of the 19th Century, higher educators not only prepared the teachers for pre-collegiate schools, but we also dictated the curriculum, issued the tests, approved secondary school courses, and, of course, decided who would be allowed to proceed into postsecondary education.

Over time, though, the two systems pulled away from each other. Higher education retained the right to prepare teachers and, in some states, to approve courses of study for college entry. Indeed, to this day, when college faculty perceive major omissions in the preparation of entering students, they often add new requirements for admission--another year of mathematics, for example--and schools dutifully respond by offering such coursework. However, decisions about curriculum more generally, about what to teach to different students, and about graduation requirements increasingly have been made by local citizen boards or state policymakers.

A Wave of New Partnership Programs

The movement toward separation--indeed toward virtual neglect--began to reverse during the late sixties and early seventies. Under pressure to increase enrollments of minority students, higher educators turned to the only place those potential college students could be found in large numbers: the schools.

This time, however, our initiatives had a different character from past relationships with the schools. There were, by and large, no curricular or instructional edicts from education schools; no changes in admissions standards; no modifications of training programs for teachers or counselors. In short, no changes in regular institutional practice. Instead, special programs were created and tacked on to the outside of both systems--programs staffed by special employees, usually considered more "like" the students themselves, who would provide special tutoring, advising, or compensatory instruction. The students even entered into college by "special" admission.

This first wave of college/school "partnership" programs often made big differences in the lives of participating students: college education became a reality for many young people who would never have even considered college. The programs, however, were collaborative in name only. While school people generally identified students they deemed to have college potential and provided an occasional bus to transport students to college campuses, the rest was done by college employees in after-school, Saturday or summer programs. Neither college- nor school-level educators seemed to want to explore deeper roots to the problems of underrepresented minority students, especially those embedded in the education systems.

A Second Wave of Partnership Programs

Toward the mid- to late seventies, declining scores on the SAT and rapid increases in the number of college freshmen being held for remedial coursework prompted a second wave of school-focused activity from higher education. In a series of finger-pointing reports, we higher educators blasted our K-12 colleagues for "grade inflation" and declining standards that left large numbers of college freshmen unprepared for college-level work. By 1983, when the National Commission chaired by University of Utah president David Gardner released A Nation at Risk, these charges had reached a near feverish pitch.

Once again, however, our eventual response to the National Commission's Call to Action was essentially programmatic, rather than systemic. With a few exceptions, most colleges and universities did not help to reverse the tide toward lower standards by increasing their admissions requirements: we were too worried about losing enrollments. Similarly, no major changes were made in the content or quality of teacher training programs. Rather, handfuls of interested faculty members here and there reached out to create new linkages with teachers in their same fields--linkages that they hoped would stimulate improved teaching.

Some of these initiatives--like the Academic Alliances which now dot the entire country--are quite informal, with little structure other than a monthly meeting. Others are much more highly structured--like California's highly regarded Subject Matter Projects and other spin-offs from the Bay Area Writing Project--with lengthy summer institutes for teachers and regular follow-up during the year. All, though, tend to promote a sense of colleagueship and shared mission between faculty members in schools and colleges, as well as a deep connection to the discipline itself.

Like many of the equity programs, which provide wonderful experiences for individual students, many of these new teacher-focused efforts are quite wonderful for individual teachers. They enjoy exploring literature and new developments in their fields with faculty members who treated them as colleagues; they treasure opportunities to have serious discussions about teaching with peers who are committed to the profession. Anecdotal evidence suggests that these experiences have kept many teachers from leaving the profession entirely. Again, however, these projects rarely touch enough teachers within a school or school system to result in across-the-board improvements in teaching and learning, nor do they often address problems within the school or district as a whole that impede the ability of teachers to teach in new ways.

Criticisms Persist

When asked about cooperation with the schools, most college presidents point with some pride to a long list of partnership programs of both sorts--student- and teacher-focused. And indeed, almost every campus in the country houses numerous of these engagements with the schools.

Despite all this activity, however, there is a perception that higher education is "sitting on the sidelines" in the current school reform effort. Governors and business leaders have been especially harsh in their attacks on us, but there is growing animosity in K-12 as well. In fact, at meetings where K-12 leaders gather with political and business leaders to chart the course of reform, it has become almost ritualistic to ask, "Where the hell is higher education?"

Why such a mismatch in perceptions? We think there are three reasons.

- First, though individual colleges and universities have mounted many programs of involvement with the schools, higher education as a whole has played little or no role in reform policy discussions to date. Even on issues where we have a clear stake and much to add--like the content of new national standards, for example--higher education has not found a voice. While individual faculty and staff members are engaged with the schools, our engagements do not include institution-wide leaders and certainly not institutional leaders acting collectively. This absence is all the more noticeable because of the energetic presence of leaders from business and government.

- Second, although we offer a great deal to schools, there is often a mismatch between what we offer and what schools need. Today's teachers and administrators are caught in an increasingly tight vise between policymakers who press them for ever better results and students who have ever more complex needs. These professionals say that they need help as they've never needed it before--and that higher education has a virtual monopoly on many of the resources they need, including physicists to help with the physics curriculum, geographers to help prepare teachers to teach geography, and researchers who can help them weigh alternative instructional approaches. But when they turn to us, they find a series of small, unconnected programs, offered hit and miss, and that aren't easily accessible (especially to professionals in the most troubled schools). Our research, some teachers claim, too often doesn't address the real questions they face, and even the conversations between us suffer from vast differences in the cultures of the two systems.

- Finally, as the nation gets further into the K-12 reform effort, it is becoming increasingly apparent to those who are looking ahead of the reform curve that all of their efforts will not make much of a difference without certain reforms in the way higher education goes about its own business. Like it or not, we really are "all one system," with countless interdependencies. Many believe, for example, that the new national standards and assessments won't make a difference unless colleges use the results in the admissions process. Others maintain that the curricular reforms into which we have all poured such energy will implode without much better prepared teachers than the ones we are producing today. Reformers believe they have nowhere to turn on these matters but to us, and they grow frustrated.

Thinking Differently About School/College Connections

If this gulf--between systems and between colleagues--is not bridged there is great danger that the current reform effort will unravel before making any headway on the serious underachievement problems among American students. There is also great danger that the anger and frustration among governors, business leaders and K-12 educators will further undermine public confidence in institutions of higher education.

If we are to make a serious contribution to the current reform effort, we will have to think differently about connections between colleges and schools. Unlike our most recent engagements with K-12, our new collaborative efforts must be rooted in new ideas.

We suggest that leaders from higher education invite their counterparts from K-12 to join in a new effort to make both systems work better--and work together--for our young people. This effort would be organized around three basic principles:

- First, just as the business community realized that its adopt-a-school programs were insufficient to bring about significant change, so too must we understand that our "partnership" programs with local schools--however energetic--are simply not enough. We must work together toward more systemic reforms.

- Second, no matter how hard reform minded leaders try, it is impossible to bring about significant change in elementary and secondary education without changes in the way that higher education does business--including how we prepare teachers, admit students, and organize our services to schools.

- Third, although much has been written about the high international standing of our system of higher education in comparison to that of our K-12 system, the fact is that both systems need improvement. If we work together, there is much we can learn from each other about enhancing teaching and learning.

A new effort organized around these three core ideas could indeed lead us in more promising directions. But how do we move from ad hoc programs to systemic strategies? What changes must higher education make inside its own house? What can we learn from K-12? How do we even begin to think about all of this?

Moving Forward at the Local Level

Over the past year college and school district leaders in ten communities have worked together to fashion their own answers to these questions. With support from the Pew Charitable Trusts and AAHE, these leaders are trying to move beyond special programs for students and teachers to create more comprehensive reform strategies, spanning at least grades 7-14. The goal? To transform what happens in school and college classrooms--and in the institutions more broadly--in ways that will result in significantly increased numbers of

minority and low-income students succeeding in college.

The work in these communities provides important insights into both the "hows" and the "whats" of the local, "bottoms-up" education reform effort needed to complement the national emphasis on new standards for student achievement. Perhaps most important, the experience in these communities points to an urgent need for local leaders--college, school district and community--to come together to develop new structures to guide and support systems change efforts, kindergarten through graduate school. We call these structures "K-16 Councils".

What is a K-16 Council and what will it do? A K-16 Council is, quite simply, a vehicle to pull together disparate reform impulses--kindergarten through college--into a more coherent whole. Composed of college presidents, school superintendents, business and community leaders in a given city, these Councils will commit themselves to working together over time to:

- o analyze student achievement patterns, pre-k through post-graduate;
- o develop a comprehensive systems change plan to improve student outcomes; and,
- o report to the public annually on student achievement patterns, what is being done to improve them, and what parents and others can do to help.

Moving Forward at the National Level

The challenge to these local K-16 Councils will be to build a bottoms-up reform strategy in their communities. But there are some issues that transcend local boundaries. Thus, to provide aggressive national leadership in the effort to connect higher education and K-12 in a mutual effort to improve student learning, we are also creating a national K-16 Council, composed of higher education and K-12 leaders. This group will:

- o promote the establishment of local K-16 Councils;
- o provide a regular Forum for dialogue, joint exploration of important issues and joint planning between leaders from K-12 and higher education;
- o provide a home for research or action projects of mutual interest;
- o speak out on key policy issues in education and/or the broader well-being of children and youth; and,
- o otherwise provide leadership in the effort to improve American

education, pre-K through post-G.

Over time, the Council might tackle any number of issues of mutual interest to K-12 and higher education, including issues specific to education as well as those related to the general well-being of young people. At the direction of the Council, staff will prepare issue analyses, commission papers, invite in outside advisors, or otherwise help the members explore and, where appropriate, speak out on important matters. The products of such a Council will range from think pieces designed to help local college or school leaders to think through available options to more formal position papers and legislative testimony.

Key Tasks for Local or National Action

What are the key tasks for attention by these Councils, local or national? Experience with the 10 Compact Communities points to at least four.

Task One: Analysis. While most communities produce reams of data on student achievement at both the K-12 and college levels, rarely do the leaders in those communities use the data to help bring about--or refocus--change efforts. That's unfortunate, because data--properly used--can be a powerful lever for change:

- data, properly displayed, are more effective than almost anything else in mobilizing community concern and action;
- data, properly analyzed, will help in focusing attention and action on real, rather than imagined problems; and,
- data, properly reported, are essential in monitoring the effects of various interventions and in attaining internal and public accountability.

The first task, then, for K-16 Councils will be to pull together available data on what happens to local young people as they take the journey from pre-kindergarten up through the grades and into college--who achieves at what levels, what else is going on in children's lives, who drops out, who takes college prep courses, who leaves college and why. By analyzing patterns for different groups of students, and by sharing these data widely and probing for explanations, the Councils will begin to establish a foundation for developing a broad-based change strategy.

Task Two: Setting Clear Expectations and Developing Assessment Strategies. Within K-12, there is widespread agreement on the need to move toward clearer specification of the knowledge and skills that students should master at particular milestones and to develop new, more "authentic" methods to assess student performance, including portfolios of student work. Indeed, at the national level, groups of teachers and faculty members are hard at work developing national standards within each of the major disciplines. Within higher education, there is also movement toward new forms of assessment and more clarity about desired student outcomes, albeit more slowly.

There are compelling reasons to draw these efforts together. Students, for example, would clearly benefit from consistent signals from both sectors about what knowledge is important and how it will be measured. Policymakers, too, yearn for clearer and more consistent understandings of the outcomes we both value.

Yet there are few ties between these quite parallel efforts in both systems. Moreover, there are few ties between the national standard setting efforts and local efforts to improve teaching and learning. This is particularly unfortunate because if we've learned anything from past reform efforts it is this: we're more likely to make substantial progress if we have agreement on goals in advance.

Local K-16 Councils can be the vehicle for communities to wrestle with choices about what they want local young people to learn. The Councils can establish committees where faculty members from both levels, together with community representatives, develop clear statements of goals for student learning--incorporating national standards, but going beyond. These bodies can also design assessment strategies. Over time, then, the outcome statements and new assessments can replace current "seat-time" standards.

Task Three: Building Support Systems for Teachers and Schools. Most states and school districts are moving rapidly to decentralize authority to the building level. The idea is to give teachers and schools responsibility for deciding how to get students to newly-defined outcome goals. In effect, schools will have flexibility more like that historically granted to professors and to colleges; at both levels, though, professionals will now be clearly accountable for results.

At the K-12 level, teachers--and principals and counselors, too--will need considerable support in order to make this transition successfully. Many teachers, for example, will not themselves meet the new standards for student achievement; they will need help in deepening their subject matter knowledge. Others may have adequate knowledge of their disciplines, but be unprepared to effectively engage diverse groups of students in the subject; these teachers will need support to learn new instructional strategies. Principals, teachers, counselors and parent leaders will also need help in responding to the challenge of site-based decision-making.

Higher education faculty will also need help in improving teaching and learning. This is important not only to the effort to improve student outcomes but also because higher education faculty serve as powerful models to future teachers. Such future teachers learn to teach not just in education classes, but in college classrooms from their professors of mathematics, biology, and English.

At the very least, this means that local Councils will need to:

- o assure that the teachers produced by participating postsecondary institutions themselves meet the highest standards for student performance--and know their subjects deeply enough to teach them successfully to all learners;

- o design support systems--including informal Academic Alliances, more formal "subject matter projects" and/or Centers for Teaching and Learning--of sufficient size and scope to enable teachers at both levels to explore better ways to communicate and assess core ideas in their fields--and, where necessary, to deepen their knowledge of the subjects they teach.

Task Four: Improving Incentive Systems. There is widespread agreement that current reward systems don't always send the right messages. In higher education, there is a sense that research is overemphasized to the near exclusion of other forms of scholarship, like teaching and professional service. In K-12, reward structures are even more perverse: schools that serve poor children, for example, actually lose money if they improve student achievement.

One thing that K-16 Councils can do is to create forums for considering changes in reward systems. What changes might help to encourage professionals in new directions? What do we know from other fields about the kinds of rewards that work?

Another important role for the Councils will be to grapple the question of consequences for students. While higher education may not yet be thinking along these lines, many powerful political and education leaders believe that these new standards must be used in college admissions in order to have the desired effect on student academic effort. This raises important substantive issues at both the local and national level. Should higher education deny admission to students who do not meet the standards? If so, under what conditions? Should high-stakes usage be conditioned on the provision of adequate or equal opportunity to learn? This matter also raises procedural issues. How can colleges evaluate student portfolios? Should we recast admissions requirements in outcomes terms? Does this mean abandoning traditional measures like the SAT/ACT battery?

If we are to move ahead as a nation, we need vehicles for K-12 and higher educators to honestly engage these questions--and each other. Local and national K-16 Councils can become such vehicles.